ANDROID™ NETRUNNER™
THE CARD GAME

# First Contact

"Welcome to Heinlein. There are 54 hours left of sunshine before the Lunar Night, and it is currently a balmy 92 degrees Celsius outside. Thank you for traveling on the Challenger Memorial Ferry, we hope to see you again soon." Nasir grabbed his tote and class-1 case, unhooking himself from the harness in which he'd spent the last several hours. He felt a bit light-headed from the gravitational changes that occurred during the flight. Acceleration, weightlessness, inversion, deceleration–the light but constant lunar gravity was almost a relief. He joined the line of fellow travelers headed for the ferry hatch and Starport Kaguya.

The starport was not nearly as impressive as many earth airports, but then it only received dozens of flights a day, and not hundreds. The gate area was a circular room about 100 feet across, with rows of seats for those waiting to embark, a small counter for the gatekeeper, and a refreshment stand. Small rectangular windows showing a smattering of distant stars encircled the top of the room, making the gate area feel like a spaceship itself.

There were several ports along one wall. Nasir went up and examined them; they were high-powered e-prongs, with one red one on the end labeled "Maintenance only". Bingo. Glancing around, no one seemed to be paying any attention to the recently arrived earthling wearing a tattered trench. Nasir pulled out his portable rig and plugged it into the red port. As expected, it gave him a rejection notice that he quickly bypassed. Uploading an interference program, he quickly initialized his explorer program and had it chart the network. It was hooked into servers all over Heinlein. He started a trace for the wave field signatures; the next time he checked in it should have a location for him. He had deactivated all wireless devices except for his PAD once he reached the Beanstalk to prevent snooping. He unplugged his console and stuffed it back into his bag. It was a short walk to the trains that led into Heinlein proper.

The train was more crowded than the Ferry. Nasir stood at one end, ignoring the drop-down handhold, as the ride was silky smooth with nary a bump or jostle. It was strange to see the barren gray landscape of the moon, its uniformity suggesting a lack of forward progress. But the large dome of Heinlein proper continued to grow larger; there were dozens of tall towers and arcologies that rose from the jumbled mess of buildings beneath them. Nasir could not name a single one. It looked larger and more intimidating than he had imagined it to be.

An older woman wearing the ever popular spacesuit around her waist was sitting across from him. Staring at him. He decided to stare back, and she quickly turned away, nose to her PAD. Nasir had read that a lot of the natives of the moon wore emergency suits in case there was ever a loss of atmospheric pressure. He was one of the few in the car that didn't have one; though he doubted that the large, baggy suits that a family of four was currently sporting several seats up were that effective. They looked like the cloned astronaut at the Challenger

Station, who was wearing similar bulky attire. They even had the large, shiny helmets strapped to their suitcases. Nasir wondered what it would be like to find himself outside of the car, gasping for breath, and decided that any sort of helmet would be welcome.

"Next stop, Heinlein Station, Platform G. Please remain seated until the train comes to a complete stop." The suggestion was promptly ignored, as many passengers started grabbing their bags and staking out a space closest to the door. The family seemed to have a particularly hard time corralling their luggage; a young boy dropped his space helmet and it went bouncing and rolling down the center aisle of the car in the light gravity, much to the amusement of his sister and the chagrin of the passengers he bumped into, half-running and half-falling, chasing the runaway helmet.

Nasir stepped onto Platform G, and matched his strides to the flow of foot traffic. The platform was well-lit, with tru-lights suspended from the arched ceiling several yards above the tallest traveler. There was a light breeze, constant, that moved air through the station. He glanced back at the train, and noticed the woman he was sitting across from engaged in conversation with a blue-clad security officer. NAPD. He had forgotten they had jurisdiction up here, too.

He kept walking. They entered a pedestrian tunnel, lined with virt displays. It looked like there was a big game going on in Angel Arena, but Nasir didn't follow sports. What caught his eye, though, was a mirror. No, that wasn't a mirror. It was a small screen with the NBN News Now logo running across the bottom, and, prominently displayed, a headshot of himself. Nasir stopped cold, and his abrupt stop made the man walking behind run into him. "Hey, whattya think you're doing?" huffed the man, stepping around. "Fracking tourists!" Nasir instinctively moved to block the display, while

reading the scrolling information that flashed across it. *Wanted for potential terrorist activity…*

Was it the SEA agent? His jack into the red maintenance port? The observer bug? His final job on Earth? It wasn't legal, sure, but terrorism?

"Keep moving." There was a hand on his coat, pushing him forward.

"Hey!" He tried to shrug off the hand, but there was another hiss in his ear. "Quiet! Do you want to die?" He let himself be prodded out of the tunnel. Two NAPD officers were several steps ahead. One of them was looking at a projection from his PAD. It looked like a profile. His profile.

The officer glanced in his direction. A flicker of recognition ran across his face, and he went for his sidearm.

"Frack," said the voice in his ear. "This way!"

He was jerked to the side, into a stairwell. The person leading him had a slim build and was wearing a spacesuit, complete with mask. A woman, he guessed, though the voice was heavily modulated.

"Stop!" came the cry of the NAPD officer.

"Follow me!" said the woman, and let go of him, running up the stairs. Nasir didn't need to be told twice. He pounded up the stairs after her. He could hear the two officers below calling for backup, but he didn't dare glance back.

Up, up, up the stairs. They went up 3 flights before his fellow fugitive busted through a door on the landing into another hallway. It seemed to be deserted, and the lights were low-energy halogen that gave everything a sickly yellow glow. He followed her through, and she pulled out a pistol and shot the keypad on the other side. Warning lights above the door began to flash, but the green light on the pad disappeared in a shower of sparks.

"Here, put this on." He was tossed a suit identical to the one his apparent abductor was wearing.

He started to step into the suit and she shoved him backwards. "Take off your clothes first."

"Everything?"

"Coat first!"

He shed his coat, and she started yanking his pants down too. A number of absurd jokes ran through his mind, but it didn't seem the time and she didn't seem to be in a joking mood. There was a pounding on the other side of the door. He half-stepped, half-fell out of his pants, and then started pulling on the suit. It was tight around the chest and crotch, but it fit.

"Who are you?" he said, feeling the rubbery texture of the suit begin to loosen and mold itself around his body.

She pointed to the left. "Stay close!"

Was this really happening? He followed her down the hallway. It dead-ended in a heavy door. It had a large hatch on it, and warning signs written in three different languages. "Warning! Emergency surface exit only. Do not open." She dragged the hood up over his face, and zipped it up. "Get ready."

She spun the hatch and pushed the door open. An alarm sounded, and warning lights on the side began to flash. She pushed him through, and he found himself on top of a hangar. He felt even lighter than he had before, although the gravity was the same. There was a hopper several yards away. It looked modified; armored. Her voice crackled from a speaker in his hood. "Get to the hopper!" He went.

As he did, he glanced back. Three men in black space suits busted through the emergency hatch. He saw the flashes from his companion's pistol, but heard nothing but the rush of blood in his own ears. One of the men dropped to his knees, clutching his shoulder. The other two opened fire in return. He tensed, waiting for the bullets to rip into him at any second.

But he felt nothing. A door on the side of the hopper opened up. He jumped through. His companion joined a second later, and slid into the control seat. The door sealed and sound suddenly returned as the cabin filled with air. She ripped off her hood, and black curly hair framed an attractive face. "Buckle up," she barked.

He slid into the seat beside her. "Who are you?" he asked again.

"I'm Rachel Beckman. Your guardian angel." The engines fired, and the NAPD and station dropped away beneath them.

**— To be continued in the *Up and Over* Data Pack…**

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